



## KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

### Performance Audit of Jail Overtime, Report No. 2006-06

This audit examined the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention's use of overtime to staff the county's two adult jails. The topic was of interest to county policy-makers because the department's overtime expenditures have been growing and have exceeded overtime budgets since 2002.

The audit found that using officers working overtime to staff posts can be slightly less expensive than hiring additional full-time staff. Moreover, overtime affords management the flexibility to address fluctuations in workload. However, we found that overtime can be undesirable if it is used excessively, which can hurt officer morale, or if its use is driven by staffing inefficiencies. Our analysis showed that the department's practice of allowing officers to earn comp time for extra hours worked can cost the department fifty percent more than the cost of overtime pay. Additionally, the current caps on scheduled leave allow more officers to be on leave than can be covered by the remaining staff. The audit recommends that the department eliminate these two current staffing inefficiencies.

The audit also reviewed the county's process of budgeting for overtime and found that current practices do not include an analysis of the most cost-effective mix of full-time staff and overtime. The department has developed an Operational Forecasting Model (OFM) that could potentially be used to identify the most cost-effective mix of resources; however, this model has not been used to budget for overtime in the jails. Our report recommends that the department complete development of the OFM with the objective of using it for its 2008 budget proposal.

#### **Audit Objectives**

The audit addressed three key questions about overtime use in the county's jails:

- How is overtime currently budgeted and could the department improve its budget process?
- How is overtime used in the jails?
- Is the current use of overtime cost-effective and could some overtime be avoided?

#### **Jail Overtime Budgeting**

We found that the county's process of budgeting for overtime is not based on an analysis of the most cost-effective mix of full-time staff and overtime. Overtime can be less expensive than hiring full-time staff and can provide management with the flexibility to respond to changes in workload. However, too much overtime can hurt morale, and the department should eliminate any avoidable overtime.

A conclusion of the report is that the budget process should include an analysis of the most cost-effective mix of staffing resources and recognize that there is a limit to the amount of overtime officers can work without jeopardizing safety and morale.

The department has developed an Operational Forecasting Model (OFM) that could potentially be used to identify the most cost-effective mix of resources and to estimate the budgetary impact of policy changes related to staffing, leave, and overtime.

#### **How Overtime Is Currently Used**

We investigated whether there were any trends or patterns associated with high overtime rates. We found no strong relationship between officers working a lot of overtime and taking a lot of leave, and we also found little correlation between hours of overtime worked and years of service, age, or gender.

#### **Avoidable Overtime**

Our audit identified two jail staffing inefficiencies that lead to avoidable overtime. The first is caused by the caps on the amount of scheduled leave allowed on each shift. These caps, which are set in the Collective Bargaining Agreement, allow more officers to be on leave than can be covered by the remaining staff. This means that it is likely that overtime is necessary when every leave slot is taken.

The second staffing inefficiency is created by the department's comp time practices. Currently, officers who work extra hours can opt to earn either overtime pay or comp time at the rate of one and one-half hours of leave for every extra hour worked. Our analysis shows that because of the additional leave comp time generates, comp time can be 50 percent more expensive than paying overtime pay for extra hours worked.

#### **Recommendations**

The report recommends that the department:

- Complete further development and evaluation of the OFM with the objective of using it for its 2008 operating budget proposal.
- Take steps to eliminate the use of comp time and to lower the amount of vacation, holiday, and comp time leave that can be taken so the caps more closely match the amount of leave that can be covered by existing staffing levels.

#### **Executive Response**

The County Executive concurred with both audit recommendations.